

Planned Cut In Bombers Hit by GOP

By John G. Norris

Washington Post Staff Writer

A Republican Congressional task group charged yesterday that the Administration's plans to cut U.S. strategic bomber strength will reduce the Nation's deliverable nuclear megatonnage by 29 per cent or more.

It raised the question of whether such a slash will so weaken the present American strategic strike superiority over Russia that it may invite a massive surprise Soviet attack on the United States.

Rep. Craig Hosmer (R-Calif.), chairman of the House GOP Conference's Committee on Nuclear Affairs, made public a "special report" to the Conference, analyzing the possible impact of the bomber cutback on U.S. deterrent forces.

Bombers vs. Missiles

In essence, the report again raises the bombers vs. missiles controversy that involved Sen. Barry Goldwater and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara in last year's presidential campaign, updated to include McNamara's recently announced plans to scrap 425 of the Air Force's present 680 B-52 and B-58 strategic bombers by 1971.

The Defense Secretary also announced at the time that 210 FB-111s — a proposed new bomber version of the controversial TFX fighter — will be developed and built to operate in conjunction with about 260 of the latest model B-52s after 1970.

Hosmer concluded that this net reduction in bombers—despite some additional new missiles planned — will leave the United States in 1971 with only 71 per cent of the "nuclear weapon explosive power" it has today. He did so by comparing the difference in megatonnage that can be carried by bombers and missiles.

A megaton represents the explosive force of one million tons of TNT.

Average Bomb Load

Hosmer's report said that the "most usual unofficial public estimate" of such "ex-

plosive power" today is 30,000 megatons, figuring that strategic bombers can carry an average load of 40 megatons each while strategic missiles average one-megaton warheads. With 680 bombers and 1350 missiles today, the United States can deliver a blow of 28,550 megatons and has about 1450 megatons in reserve weapons, he said.

By 1971, Hosmer said, the United States will have about 470 bombers and 1710 missiles — a force that can deliver only 20,310 megatons. He went on to say that this will reduce the present superiority of U.S. strategic forces over the Soviet Union's — recently estimated by McNamara at more than 3 or 4 to 1—to about 2 or 3 to 1.

The Homer report quoted Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, retired Air Force chief of staff, as saying that the FB-111 will be inadequate for the strategic job planned for it, and said if this is so, the U.S. ratio over Russia will slip still further.

During the 1964 election campaign McNamara contended that similar comparisons of the "raw megatonnage" that can be carried by bombers and missiles is fallacious for several reasons, largely because the missiles can get through to the target while bombers may not.

Defense Policy Critic

Hosmer, who is a ranking Republican on the Joint Atomic Energy Committee and a frequent critic of Administration defense policy, is from Long Beach, Calif., close to the Nation's major aircraft plants.

"The Nation's military leaders in uniform have been gagged and they are thus unable to help us evaluate whether or not this drastic reduction in retaliatory strike-back capability automatically will trigger a Soviet decision to strike us because they calculate we are no longer able to inflict unacceptable damage on their homeland," Hosmer's report went on.

"We do not know how Secretary McNamara arrived at his conclusion the reduction will not trigger a Soviet surprise Sunday punch. We do know that his judgment has sometimes proved fallible. . . .

"Unless and until it is checked and re-checked indepently, it is safe to assume only that the cutback may result in reducing our strategic forces to little more than a flashy ornament on an 'Edselized' defense establishment."